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## Vision Coalition seeks to curb teen drinking

By Margaret Snider Telegraph Correspondent



Philip Wood / The Telegraph

Oak Ridge High School senior Lizette Delabahan looks over drug and alcohol literature at the Vision Coalition town hall meeting on underage drinking Thursday evening.



Numerous groups rallied behind a single purpose in El Dorado Hills — to stop teens from drinking.

National statistics have shown that around 100 people each day die in alcohol-related traffic accidents, averaging about one every 15 minutes. According to El Dorado Fire Department Battalion Chief Dave Roberts 72 percent of those deaths are youth between the ages of 17 and 25.

“So you guys are working overtime to kill yourselves out there on the roads,” said Roberts.

El Dorado Hills Vision Coalition, headed by Executive Director DJ Peterson, sponsored a Town Hall Meeting on April 7, in which youth, community organizations, public agencies, and parents joined together to present and absorb information about this problem, and to brainstorm possible solutions.

Roberts described the Every Fifteen Minutes program, which is offered every other year to Oak Ridge High School juniors and seniors.

Without warning to students, the simulated crash scene, with all the juniors and seniors at hand, results in full response of law enforcement and fire department, just as in real life.

“Bloody scene, dead person or people, drunk driver,” said Roberts. “The kids get a very good understanding of what happens, and how many people are actually affected by one bad decision.”

Other public agencies were represented by El Dorado County Sheriff John D’Agostini, Board of Supervisors representative John Knight, Christy White of El Dorado County Health Department, and California Highway Patrol Public Information Officer Jasper Begay.

Around 10 Vision Coalition partner organizations presented information about their programs.

Out of the more than 50 attendees at the Town Hall Meeting, a number were youth.

16-year-old Ponderosa High School sophomore McKenzie Jones came to the meeting directly from a soccer game. She said that she has acquaintances who have either been intoxicated while driving, or have been in a car in which the driver was intoxicated.

“Fortunately, nobody has had any accidents,” said Jones. “But it’s a matter of time until something happens.”

She said that she experienced the PARTY (Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth) program last year.

“It’s definitely impactful,” said Jones. “It’s quite an experience.”

Messages from the public agencies centered on choice and accountability.

“I know one of the things that I try to teach my kids,” said Knight. “Good behavior, good actions, have good causes. Bad causes will get you bad results.”

Knight added that if you don’t have a problem with alcohol, you may have a friend who does. In either case, it is important to take action, and to use the resources that are available.

"If you ask us for help," said D'Agostini, "we can get you in touch with Vision Coalition, we can get you in touch with other agencies that can provide that help. You might even save your life."

CHP's Begay doesn't like the use of the word accident in these situations.

"An accident is a thing that you didn't do intentionally," said Begay. "You don't accidentally take a drink and drive."

He recalls having to tell family members that their loved one has just died in a collision.

"Life is not a video game," said Begay. "Once you make a decision, if you get hurt, you can't push reset — especially if you die."

Some of the youth attending were there because of class requirements.

"I came here for a political project by my teacher Mr. Bosch," said Oak Ridge High School senior Amber Christian, 18.

She knows personally of youth who have been affected by drunk driving, or have driven drunk themselves.

When asked why he was at the meeting, 15-year-old Nathan Tarry said, "She made me," looking over at his mother.

"I figure he can never learn too much about this issue," said Jacqueline Tarry.

For more information about programs related to underage alcohol use, and for recommendations resulting from the town hall meeting, contact EDH Vision Coalition at (916) 941-8482. Information on California Highway Patrol programs is available at (916) 464-1457.